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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR NEA AND PRM; GENEVA FOR RMA
CPA FOR J.JOHNSON

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#) [UNHCR](#)

SUBJECT: 11TH HOUR REPRIEVE FOR RUWEISHED REFUGEE CAMP

REF: A. AMMAN 7798

[1](#)B. STATE 350022

[1](#)1. (SBU) The GOJ informed UNHCR today, December 31, that the Ruweished refugee camp would be allowed to remain open until April 2004. The GOJ previously had pledged to close the camp by December 31 (ref a). 536 individuals remain in the camp, including 60 Sudanese and Somali nationals who have been approved for resettlement in the U.S. and are undergoing final processing. The majority of the camp residents -- 345 -- are Iraqi-Palestinians who seek to "return" to the West Bank or Gaza, a request the Israeli Government is unlikely to approve.

[1](#)2. (SBU) UNHCR Officer-in-Charge Chizu Matsuri told refcoord that ten Sudanese and Somali rejected asylum seekers left the Ruweished refugee camp on December 30, opting for a voluntary return to Iraq rather than to their countries of origin. Matsuri was hopeful that other camp residents, particularly the Iraqi-Palestinians, would follow suit.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Comment: We expect that small-scale voluntary returns from the camp to Iraq will continue over the next few months, as it becomes clear that resettlement is not an option for the remaining camp residents. GOJ recognition of this ongoing, spontaneous return process -- as well as GOJ desire to protect its good reputation on humanitarian issues -- likely played a key role in the decision to allow the camp to remain open into the new year. Given USG concerns that countries bordering Iraq promote a patient, organized program of returns (ref b), we will continue to urge the GOJ to allow the camp to remain open as long as it is needed.

[1](#)4. (U) CPA Baghdad minimize considered.
GNEHM